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ABSTRACT

The perennial problem of articulation of foreign language programs between the high schools and the colleges is readdressed in this paper. Six factors are identified as primary in contributing to the problem: (1) instruction is paced too fast, thus encouraging superficial learning and creating a disparity of coverage practices among the many members of the profession trying to cope with the excessive amount of material for the time available; (2) college instructors expect students to come to them "knowing" the entire corpus of grammar, even if they have only two years of instruction; (3) the four-skill objectives are not always supported by classroom practices; (4) the ability to speak the target language is the best measurement of achievement of all of the skills in the classroom, and too little emphasis is placed on this skill; (5) college placement procedures are unnecessarily diverse, often haphazard, and rarely directed to the assessment of speaking or natural forms of writing; and (6) in recent years, those giving speeches, writing articles, and doing workshops have focused on specialized topics such as individualized instruction and career education and have neglected to put the specializations into a broader context in order to provide direction for the foreign language profession. (Author/CLK)

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Keynote Address
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by
Helen P. Warriner

THE ARTICULATION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

What can be less appealing and productive than one more speech on articulation and the foreign language dropout problem? How can I possibly say anything new about a topic that has been around longer than I have? These were typical of the questions and reactions that I experienced last spring when I was asked to keynote this symposium. Having become inventive, however, in taking someone else's topic and saying what I want to say, I accepted. And furthermore, I think teasing away back there at the edges of my consciousness was the realization that as much as we have talked we haven't really tried seriously to do anything very basic about the problems of sequencing within the foreign language program. Soon I was slipping scraps of paper, scribbled-on bank deposit slips, or any available note-taking material into the George Mason Symposium folder with thoughts for this presentation.

Another day last spring, not long after Dr. LePage's invitation came, I was observing in a high school classroom, as is a common practice for me, and I became sensitized anew to the teacher's and students' struggle to "cover the book," to get through all that someone expected of them. I decided right then that it was time to put on the professional agenda an issue that almost no one giving speeches, writing for professional publications, and doing workshops has ever mentioned: there's too much between the covers of those textbooks to cover. The consequences are numerous and more seriously detrimental than most of us realize. I began to do some research in preparation for an ACTFL session that I scheduled as a result of my concern that afternoon. I have

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conducted two surveys related to my thesis that our quantitive goals are unrealistic: one of my fellow supervisors in the other states and one of Virginia secondary school teachers. Although my research has been limited to secondary schools, I am convinced by my own experience and by what others have contributed that the problem of pacing material too fast is not limited to that level; it is just as harmful to the study of languages in the colleges and universities.

Preparation for these two November responsibilities overlapped naturally, and I am now convinced that there are some new efforts that ought to be tried and some old ones that we should remind ourselves of. I, therefore, come before you this morning with an old-hat topic in which I am genuinely interested and to which I think I bring some new thought that I hope will lead to professional action.

Number one is already alluded to by the hypothesis I mentioned previously and which I will restate: We are kidding ourselves if we think that we are very successful in teaching languages in the time that we allow ourselves to do it. I shall spend more time with this problem than with other points related to articulation because I believe that it is the most basic and serious curricular issue that we face. Also, it has detrimental effects that go beyond the mere flow of students within the sequence.

Go back to the early 1960's with me. In those post-Sputnik days, we decided that we had better catch up with the Russians verbally as well as technologically, so we added two skills--listening and speaking--to our long-espoused objectives, reading and writing. We realized that we also ought to know more about the other peoples of the world, so we expanded, intensified, and changed the teaching of culture. So far, so good. These were overdue changes, if they were precipitated by the Russians and the wrong motives.

But where we went very wrong, I more and more realize, is that we expected teachers to cover the previous course, curriculum, or whatever you want to call it--that is, from "¿Qué es el burro?" through the past subjunctive by June of level two--and teach the kids to speak the language as well. (Please bear with me as I use comfortable secondary school allusions and translate them into your own sequence as appropriate if you are a college listener. Just two weeks ago at the Southern Conference, I met a university instructor involuntarily responsible for a crash course in which all of the grammar of French is taught in one quarter. The problem is yours too, my university friends.) Back to the issue. In the early sixties we doubled or perhaps more than doubled our objectives without allowing ourselves more time to get the job done. Oh yes, some of us in the high schools advocated spreading the first two levels over at least three years, but the texts didn't change to make such an adjustment very feasible. To my knowledge, the college people didn't do that much for the problem. The result is that we now have more diversity of coverage than ever and articulation problems have increased. Some of us don't finish the second-year book until well into the third year. Others convert the second year into what Bev Enwall, the foreign language supervisor in South Carolina, calls "the verb year" and succeed breathlessly in getting through the past subjunctive by the end of level two. And you, college friends, get them all. There is no definition of level one or level two in practice in the high schools. The resulting problems not only fall into the laps of college professors who receive our students. My own experience and the two surveys which I have done reveal the following problems, to name only a few, which beset us at the secondary level:

1. The same lack of articulation exists within the high school sequence also, especially between the junior and senior high schools.

2. Confusion and frustration reigns among teachers, students, and parents about quantitative coverage.

3. The poor sequencing and the speed of coverage of material contribute significantly to the foreign language dropout problem.

4. Students don't understand why they are still using last year's book.

5. Parents don't understand why their children haven't finished last year's book.

6. In instances in which two levels are spread over three years, additional books have to be purchased for the overlap time. Textbook acquisition, however financed, nearly doubles, and this requires money that could much more productively be invested in other scholastic applications.

7. Teachers cannot do what they realize they should; they cannot be creative. They are too busy rewriting the curriculum, adapting materials, doing handouts, meeting to make adjustments, and just coping. They and students become slaves to texts.

The surveys that I did comprised the most productive research for which I was ever responsible. They yielded much more than I anticipated. As a result of them, I am now convinced that we are truly kidding ourselves if we think we know what level one French or level two German is--in practice. Almost unanimously, we recognize the futility of completing books and experience the resulting effects and frustrations. We are all too often exposing the material; we aren't teaching students.

It's time to face the situation realistically. It's time to come to grips with the real problem--one about which we can do something.

Here is how we go about it, in my opinion. First, we need a public airing of the issue, and I plan to devote my efforts to seeing that this happens. I have a session on this topic scheduled for authors, editors, and anyone interested at the ACTFL annual meeting in San Francisco two weeks from now. Lorraine Strasheim of the Indiana Language Language Program, Tony Gradisnik, Supervisor of Foreign Languages in Milwaukee; Betty Ryan, Foreign Language Editor

for the Scott Foresman Company; and a secondary school teacher join me as fellow panelists. After that, I plan to do some writing for the professional journals. If consensus continues to manifest itself, I would hope that it would be feasible for ACTFL to secure grant funding for the establishment of language-specific task forces composed of hard-core practitioners to recommend the direction for fundamental curriculum reform, especially regarding quantitative coverage.

I don't blame the authors and publishers. They give us what we ask for, and what we get will be different if they know that we want to slow down the pace. All of us have just been thoughtlessly acquiescing to tradition or making our own second-best adjustments and struggling to cope, often in silent rebellion in our own classrooms.

Enough said, for the time being anyway, about texts. As I indicated I would do, I have spent more time on this issue than I shall on the others because I think it is a great and grave problem and one about which we can take action. There are other points which I want to make today, however, in reference to our articulation and dropout problems.

Closely related is my second point. You at the college level can help by reducing your quantitative expectations of your own students in the basic skill levels and by not demanding that students coming into your sequence from the high schools know the complete continuum of grammar if they have had less than three years. The thought that you do expect this, whether it is justified or not, is the primary factor that causes fear and trembling among our high school teachers and the precipitous and senseless rush to "get through it all." We must work together as a profession, and we must be reasonable in our expectations of our students and of each other.

Dr. LePage provoked my third point by his question, "Is the sequencing problem one of vastly different teaching methods?" I think to some degree it is, yes, but perhaps we need to look a little deeper than just at the methods. The real question is, do we really agree on what we are trying to accomplish--on the objectives? In theory, I think we do. Most high school and college teachers readily ascribe to four-skill instruction, but what happens in practice might be very different. All too often the students are silent receivers of the word rather than active producers of target-language speech. I would estimate from my extensive observation experience that the average high school student having completed two years or a college beginner of one year would not have been engaged for more than a total of two hours in actual target-language production--speaking--of a non-manipulative nature. Most teachers like to talk. It is easier to hold the floor ourselves than to draw hesitant beginners out. It's easier to teach reading, writing and grammar, or at least to go through the motions of it, than to get the students to say something. And most of us have been exposed to more reading and writing experience within the classroom than we have to listening and speaking. Therefore, for all of these reasons, all too often we don't really commit ourselves in practice to teaching the students to speak. Do we do what we say we do? Do we apply our philosophy? Ask yourselves some objective, soul-searching questions. What is your classroom like? Who's doing the talking? And in what language? If we could answer these questions a little more positively than I think most of us can, perhaps this would be a significant step in the direction of making foreign language learning more successful and therefore in diminishing our sequencing problems.

Point number four: Related to the question of objectives, I would like to try out this observation on you. By experience, I have come to believe

that the amount of free-response, non-manipulative oral production of the target language on the part of the students is a measure of successful instruction. In other words, if you ask me what goes on in a "good" foreign language class, I would answer that I want to see a significant amount of oral student target-language usage. Do I consider speaking more important than the other skills? That is not the question. Speaking is the skill in which we must make the greatest time investment. It is not at all difficult or time consuming to teach students already literate in their native language to read and write in a Romance or Germanic language what they can say in the new language to the degree that they have been exposed to it. Furthermore, I am confident in a good degree of accuracy of this index: that students in classrooms in which a lot of speaking goes on can indeed handle the other skills well and that, conversely, students who are passive class participants cannot speak and what reading and writing they do is labored, artificial, superficial, perfunctory, and a lot of other things for which I have little respect. If there were more assiduousness among us in the achievement of the oral objective, many of our problems, including the articulatory ones, would fade away like autumn leaves in a November rain. Some of us don't do much about it.

Point number five: Our placement procedures are extremely poor. We don't <u>have</u> any at the high school level. If the students pass the course, whatever the course was, they go on to the next level, no matter what that is like. It's a sink-or-swim world, according to all of the talk that I hear about the foreign language dropout problem, and a lot of our students do not survive. At the college level, one institution's procedures are as different from another's as our high school years are. There is only one point that most have in common: rarely does any placement system take the listening and speaking skills into consideration. High school teachers know that. That's a

major factor why they feel compelled, sometimes against their better judgment, to "get through the subjunctive," to cover all the grammar. Paul Pimsleur said (and I quote in paraphrased fashion), "A teacher establishes his values by what's on the tests." High school teachers know your values and want to look good. We need major surgery on college placement procedures. Band-aids won't do.

Point six: Those of us who are giving speeches, writing articles, and doing workshops have teachers terribly confused. We've told them to individualize, to humanize, to do career education, and now to teach for communicative competence. (I sometimes wonder about that one. What is language instruction all about if it isn't to make students communicatively competent?) Valid as any of these issues are, we usually come on so strong that we make them appear totally new, different, and as something else to be added on. They are presented as such fadistic, new-fangled ideas that their treatment is superficial and they get only transitory attention, not the serious consideration that they really deserve. It isn't fashionable, for example, to individualize in 1977. We did that three years ago. Teachers are confused. What <u>are</u> our values? What survives the professional literature and the annual meeting programs? The basic four skills get lost. We don't teach the language because we are too busy trying to learn to <u>do something</u> new. Many of our teachers, as Alan Schmieder says, "are walking cemeteries of ideas." Give 'em half a chance. Many of them will come through for us a lot better than they now do. Let's give teachers <u>leadership</u>, not confound them with confusion.

This is enough. There are other points relevant to the articulation issue, but I've said sufficient, I believe, to stimulate your thought. I have focused principally upon the theses (1) that if we let our textbooks

and traditions guide us, we will continue to expose students to material faster than any of them can gain control over it; (2) that college instructors reduce their own quantitative expectations of students and assure high school teachers of this change; (3) that we must commit ourselves in practice, as well as in theory, to our philosophically almost uncontested objectives; (4) that student participation of a non-manipulative, oral nature must be increased; (5) that placement procedures undergo drastic alterations; and (6) that the profession's leaders indeed offer leadership by addressing themselves to basic issues rather than provoke confusion by overemphasizing passing fancies and peripheral concerns.

It's time now for you to have your say, and I hope that the discussion that develops here this morning will be just a beginning for all of us in our consideration of a serious professional issue.